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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000574

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN COUP: WHO'S AT THE TABLE IN SAN JOSE

REF: A. A. TEGUCIGALPA 568

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Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, E.O. 12958 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The members of the delegations accompanying President Manuel Zelaya and de facto caretaker Roberto Micheletti represent a contrast, with long-time, core advisors on the Zelaya side, while Micheletti's team is comprised of bi-partisan, non-ideologues, united by their mistrust of Zelaya and their support for the coup. On the Zelaya side, the true hard-line ideologue is Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas, whose philosophical inflexibility will make negotiations difficult. Zelaya's other representatives are somewhat more practical, though no less fiercely loyal to Zelaya and his cause. Those on the Micheletti side are mostly attorneys, all quite polished and pragmatic, but who will need to be given a strong deal to overcome their reluctance to support Zelaya's potential return.

End Summary.

Micheletti's Team

[1](#)2. (C) The Micheletti team is heavy on lawyers, indicating that one of their goals might be to explain and defend the purported legality of the June 28 coup. Exceptions are former Ambassador to the United States Roberto Flores Bermudez, a professional diplomat, and Arturo Corrales, a savvy political operative from the centrist Christian Democrat Party.

-- Carlos Lopez Contreras: Lopez, 57, is a lawyer and diplomat. He was Foreign Minister to President Jose Azcona (1986-1990). Previously he was Ambassador to several countries and represented Honduras in a maritime dispute with Nicaragua before the International Court of Justice. He also negotiated a peace treaty with El Salvador while serving as Vice Foreign Minister. He ran for the National Party presidential nomination in 1992 and 1996. His wife, Arminda Villeda, was a leader of the movement opposing Zelaya's efforts to hold a referendum on rewriting the Constitution -- the "fourth urn."

-- Mauricio Villeda: Running mate of Elvin Santos in the November elections, Villeda is a lawyer and son of former president Ramon Villeda, a Liberal reformist who was overthrown by a coup. He was not involved in electoral politics before becoming Santos's running mate (initially he was a stand-in on the primary ballot for Santos while Santos's eligibility was being adjudicated by the courts). He is soft-spoken, thoughtful, and legalistic, and adept at expressing complex legal arguments in clear laymen's terms.

-- Vilma Morales: Chief Justice of the Supreme Court 2002-2009, Morales, a member of the National Party, consistently ruled against the Zelaya Administration and has been an ardent and outspoken defender of the June 28 coup.

-- Roberto Flores Bermudez: Ambassador to the United States until the June 28 coup, Flores is a career diplomat who entered the Honduran Foreign Service in 1977. He has also served in London and at the UN. He was Foreign Minister under Carlos Flores in 1998. He has held influential positions under both Liberal and National party governments. He is often described as quiet and reserved during meetings, intelligent, articulate and professional.

-- Arturo Corrales: Former President of and presidential candidate for the small Christian Democratic Party, Corrales is an adept political operative and considered by some to be one of the three most important political powerbrokers in Honduras (the others being former Presidents Rafael Callejas and Carlos Flores). Corrales is often referred to in the media as the "oracle" of Honduras based on his accurate political predictions. He has been in business ventures with controversial tycoon Miguel Facusse. Corrales was the one who coined the term "Cuarta Urna" to describe Zelaya's proposal to reform the Constitution.

Zelaya's Team

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13. (C) All three of the officials President Zelaya has with him in Costa Rica are from the leftist group within his political inner circle whom the Honduran political class have dubbed the "Patricios."

-- Patricia Rodas: The person for whom the "Patricios" are named, Rodas is probably the most vilified member of Zelaya's cabinet to the White Forces, other than possibly Zelaya himself. She was Secretary General of the Liberal Party until early this year, when she was named Foreign Minister. She alienated the mainstream of the party by trying to pull it to the Chavez left. She is a strong admirer of the Castro brothers. She was one of the prime movers of Zelaya's constitutional reform agenda and one of the first to publicly moot the idea back in 2008.

-- Enrique Flores Lanza: A lawyer who was Zelaya's Presidential Legal Adviser for the first half of his term, after which he was named Minister of the Presidency. He is one of Zelaya's closest advisers. Political gossip columnists have dubbed him "matalos callando" (kill them quietly) because of his soft-spoken and erudite demeanor, which reputedly masks a ruthless and calculating spirit. He was said to have openly threatened a coup to Congressional opponents during the crisis over the selection of the new Supreme Court earlier this year. He is the only other member of the Zelaya government, besides the President himself, for whom an arrest warrant has been issued. He is accused of acts of corruption related to the financing of the "cuarta urna."

-- Aristedes Mejia: Defense Minister for most of Zelaya's term, he was named to the ad-hoc position of "administrative vice president" after Elvin Santos resigned as Vice President in 2008 (to run for President) and courts ruled that the 2002 constitutional amendment creating the office of Vice President was invalid. Mejia is considered a "Patricio," but he has generally been more moderate than other members of that club, such as Rodas, Flores and former Foreign Minister and Legal Adviser Milton Jimenez.

Comment

14. (C) The players at the negotiating table in San Jose are positioned well to represent their respective positions, knowledgeable about Honduran law, and about each other. Whether they are able to find a solution to the constitutional impasse confronting depends on their ability to put aside their personal distaste for the opposing side and to accept the need for compromise. This should be possible with these two teams, with the likely exception of Rodas.
LLORENS